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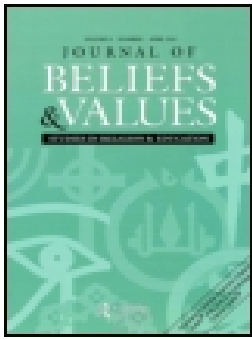
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Moral conflicts in Iranian secondary schools

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ABSTRACT

This article examines moral conflicts identified by students (N = 302) and teachers (N = 20) in the context of Iranian schools. The data were gathered in 2016 from two lower secondary schools in Tehran, one for girls and one for boys. The content analysis of students' essays and teachers' interviews reveal that moral conflicts in Iranian secondary schools have four main themes: 1. Matters related to Staff's behaviour, 2. Matters related to Students' behaviour, 3. Sensitive issues, and 4. Matters related to Parents' behaviour. In addition to discussing the main categories and subcategories, the article discusses differences between teachers and students. This paper presents a picture of morality in Iranian secondary schools by clarifying situations in which both the school staff and the students need perspective on one another as well as needing to be morally sensitive. This article can guide educators in delivering moral education both in teaching and in teacher education.

KEYWORDS

Morality; moral conflicts; secondary school; Iran

Introduction

Moral conflicts

An important aspect of moral education concerns diversity of worldviews and values (Van der Kooij, de Ruyter, and Miedema 2013). Teaching about diversity is needed to improve moral competencies (Franken 2018; Osbeck et al. 2018). As a result of the growing Muslim population in Europe, Western researchers and educators are becoming more and more interested in moral education in Islamic countries. Inspired by this interest, the present study investigates moral education in Iran by examining moral conflicts in its schools.

In moral education morality is defined as 'a set of values, norms, rules and habits that are practiced within a certain community'. (Hunink et al. 2009, 490) In the context of a school, values are influenced by an organized worldview that helps teachers and students think and act morally (Van der Kooij, de Ruyter, and Miedema 2013). In addition, teachers, students, parents, and principals bring their personal worldviews of values and their different perspectives on what is right to do; these worldviews might compete, overlap and even create conflict (Cuban 1992; Koc and Buzzelli 2016).

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Sometimes, there is no clear answer to the question of what is the right thing to do, and the daily life of a teacher involves making moral decisions (Ehrich et al. 2011). In addition, according to research, teachers are not well prepared to solve moral conflicts at school (Tirri 1999; Mahony 2009). It should also be noted that different religions as organized worldviews can have a strong effect on morality and on the way people react morally in different situations (Van der Kooij, de Ruyter, and Miedema 2013).

According to Fourie, 'The term moral conflict is used to describe any situation where normative factors (such as moral principles, values or even certain forms of moral duties) clash and require incompatible actions' (2015, 9). She adds that, both in moral dilemmas and in moral conflicts, a moral decision needs to be made using the right value; however, in a moral dilemma no clear-cut decision is possible. This means that the decision might hurt one or even both sides of the conflict. Therefore, a moral dilemma is a specific kind of moral conflict, even though in everyday life the terms moral dilemma and moral conflict might be used interchangeably (Fourie 2015).

Researchers have investigated both moral conflicts and moral dilemmas in school contexts using interviews and essays by teachers and students (Tirri 1998, 1999, 2003; Pope et al. 2009; Shapira-Lishchinsky 2011). In a study based on essays and interviews with Finnish teachers (Tirri 1998), moral dilemmas were found to be related to four main themes: (1) Matters related to teachers' work (2) The morality of students' behaviour in school (3) The rights of minority groups and (4) General school rules. In another article, Tirri (2003) categorized themes of moral conflict based on Finnish students' essays to: (1) Harassment (2) Peer relations (3) Teacher behaviour (4) Adult behaviour and (5) General rules. Other researchers have investigated the main values that overlap in teachers' moral dilemmas. According to Shapira-Lishchinsky (2011), school rules, justice, confidentiality, loyalty to colleagues, family agendas and educational standards are the values that might compete. Sometimes moral dilemmas could be related to specific contexts; for example Pope et al. (2009) investigated the values that clash when teachers encounter moral dilemmas in making student assessments. Some scholars refer to the importance of using real-life moral dilemmas to improve a school staff's moral reasoning (Gunawan, Utanto, and Adi Maretta 2017).

Morality in the Iranian educational system

The Iranian educational system focuses on Islamic religious education as a means to achieve moral education, and most of the time there is no clear delineation between the two (Hasani 2015, 2016). All aspects of Iranian society, including the educational system, are based on an Islamic worldview whose ultimate goal for education is religious (Hedayati et al. 2017a). Moreover, moral education is one of the main goals in the *Iranian Constitution* and in the country's *National Vision Plan* (Hasani 2016).

There is no specific subject for moral education in Iran. Rather, there is something like a meta-curriculum, which is embedded in all school life. This means that there is a long list of moral topics in which students should be educated and become proficient, for example; respecting the elderly, teachers and parents; praying regularly; and adhering to Islamic dress codes, indicating that women should wear the head covering known as the hijab. However, since this approach is imperative, it has led moral education being weakened and less effective in Iranian schools (Hasani 2015, 2016). Instead, Islamic education with specific

subjects (Islamic education and the Quran) as part of the National Curriculum mostly focus on teaching Islamic principles (Shabani 2005; Hedayati et al. 2017a).

In line with the educational system, teacher education is based on Islamic values and principles. Teachers become familiar with these values through compulsory courses during teacher education. Teachers are expected to be a model and guide students like a prophet (Hedayati et al. 2017a); according to research, Iranian teachers consider themselves as role models (Akbari and Tajik 2012). Furthermore, official documents such as the *National Curriculum* (2011) and *Executive Regulations for Schools* (2000) provide guidelines for teachers, principals and assistant principals. However, in practice school staff might emphasize specific values, virtues and moral themes, with a wide range of methods for promoting them or for punishing students when the values are violated (Hasani 2015).

No prior study has investigated moral conflicts in the Iranian school context; thus, this article addresses the following research questions:

- (1) What are the main themes of moral conflicts identified by Iranian students and teachers?
- (2) How the moral conflicts identified differ from each other?

Method and data

Participants

The participants in this study were students and teachers from two lower secondary schools in Tehran, one for boys and one for girls. In all, there were 302 students (female $n = 163$, male $n = 139$) from 12 to 16 years of age ($M = 14$; $SD = 1.01$). In addition there were 20 teachers from the same two schools (female $n = 10$, male $n = 10$), 27 to 52 years of age ($M = 45$; $SD = 5.8$), each having work experience of 3 to 30 years ($M = 24$; $SD = 7.1$). Teachers were subject teachers in social science (female $n = 2$, male $n = 1$), math (female $n = 1$, male $n = 2$), the Arabic language (female $n = 1$, male $n = 1$), the English language (female $n = 1$, male $n = 1$), science (female $n = 1$, male $n = 1$), literature (female $n = 1$, male $n = 1$), art (female $n = 1$, male $n = 1$), religious education (female $n = 1$, male $n = 1$) and physical education (female $n = 1$, male $n = 1$).

Procedure and instruments

Before starting the data collection, the first author obtained the necessary permission from the Iranian Ministry of Education. To collect data for research purposes this permission was the only requirement. The data were collected in two phases in a two-week period. First, students were asked to write about unfair situations which they had experienced in school. They were given 30 minutes to answer a set of open questions devised by Tirri (1998, 2003) to narrate the situation in detail. The questions were formulated as follows:

Write about a situation in your school in which you or a friend have been treated in an unfair manner. Write a story about the event and answer the following questions: Who

treated you or your friend unfairly? What happened? To whom did this happen? Where did it start?

To improve the reliability of the research, 40 students (female $n = 20$, male $n = 20$) were also randomly interviewed and asked to re-narrate the stories they had written. Students were asked if they were willing to be interviewed. However, the researcher made sure to avoid cases involving sensitive issues, as criticizing Islamic values is forbidden in Iranian schools (see Hedayati et al. 2017b). The researcher's position in schools requires respecting the rules and regulations of the Iranian Ministry as well as following research ethics for protecting the participants. Nevertheless, in this research, the sensitive issues are reported, and the schools and all participants are treated anonymously.

In the second phase 20 teachers were interviewed to answer a set of open questions devised by Tirri (1998, 1999). The teachers narrated in detail the most challenging moral dilemma they had experienced at school. The interviews lasted at most 30 minutes and the questions were formulated as follows:

What was the moral dilemma you experienced? Where and when did this happen? What kinds of issues did you have to consider in that situation? Who were the other people involved? What made this situation so problematic?

In both phases the original questions were translated from English to Farsi (the participants' native language) by the first author. The instructions were based on the original version of the questions, but in order to increase the validity of the study, the first author, who is a native speaker of Farsi, gave oral instructions and explained each question in every class and to every teacher. She introduced herself in each class and explained the research, assuring students that their answers would remain anonymous. As the society outside the schools, including organizations, private institutions, and offices is mixed in gender, the researcher's gender did not appear to be a problem. In both schools, students and teachers interacted with the researcher in similar ways.

Analysis

The study follows a more positivist approach than an interpretivist one, given that the research design belongs to a mixed methodology, including both qualitative and quantitative analyses (Creswell 2003). The essays and interviews were analysed using deductive and inductive content analysis to attain codes and categories that provide condensed and broader descriptions of the phenomenon (Elo and Kyngäs 2008). Categories from Tirri's (1998, 1999, 2003) studies, were utilized as an analytical framework to identify themes of moral conflicts in Iranian schools. Furthermore, two main categories were created and named inductively based on the content of the codes. In this study a moral conflict was understood as a conflict among various relationships that needs a moral decision, one that involves competing values, moral principles or duties (Ehrich et al. 2011; Fourie 2015). In each story more than one moral conflict was recognized, depending on how many sides were involved in the situation. Students were asked to write about unfair situations, not moral dilemmas, first because of their age, as they might not understand the concept of moral dilemma, and second because justice is

one of the main universal values whose violation can create moral conflict (Haynes 1998; Oser 1991).

In the first phase the teachers' interviews and students' writings were transcribed so that all the data were in electronic form, and all were translated into English by the first author. Next, all the texts were put into an Excel file to provide a means of locating the phrases that refer to the moral issues identified. All these statements were reduced to codes after the authors had read them through several times. For each code a new column was created in the Excel file. Here is an example of a student's story:

I was playing with my friend, and I held his neck just playing around. The assistant principal saw me. He threw me out of the class and put a negative mark in my disciplinary notebook. Even my friend tried to explain that we were just playing. He did not listen to us. (Male student)

In this story, the school staff saw a fight between two students that resulted in an unfair punishment. Therefore, two codes related to moral conflict were identified: fighting and unfair punishment.

In the second phase the codes were clustered into subcategories and main categories based on Tirri's categories as a framework. For example, the code 'fight' was put into subcategory of 'peer-relations', which in turn was part of the main category matters related to students' behaviour. The code 'unfair punishment' was categorised under the main category of matters related to staff' behaviour. Furthermore, two main categories – 'sensitive issues' and matters related to parents' behaviour – were named inductively. All together 5 main categories, 6 subcategories and 24 codes were identified (see Table 1). Moreover, 12 student' stories were removed from the analytical process as they were not clear enough to be coded. One of the subcategories – matters related to religion – has been discussed in detail in a separate chapter (Hedayati et al. 2017b).

To increase the validity of the coding, the first author coded the data after which the second author categorized 10% of the student data and 100% of the teacher data by marking independently the main categories found in the answers. Kappa values were calculated for the 5 main categories, and the values varied between .70–.80 and .88–1.0, indicating substantial and excellent agreement respectively (Landis and Koch 1977). Disagreements were discussed among the authors.

Results

Four main themes of moral conflicts based on 310 stories narrated by students and teachers were identified as follows (see Table 1): matters related to staff' behaviour, matters related to students' behaviour, sensitive issues, and matters related to parents' behaviour.

Matters related to staff' behaviour, the biggest category of moral conflict, includes issues related to the behaviour of teachers, principals and assistant principals. This category contains two main subcategories: *Punishment* and *Other matters*.

Punishment is the most common theme and includes stories related to unfair punishment and aggressive punishment. Table 1 shows that unfair punishment was discussed more than aggressive punishment. One hundred thirty-four stories were about situations in which a staff member punished a student without investigation or

Table 1. Moral conflicts in Iranian schools.

Moral conflicts	Students' point of view <i>f</i>		In total	Teachers' point of view <i>f</i>		In total
	Female	Male		Female	Male	
Matters related to Staff' behaviour	120	128	248	8	2	10
<i>Punishment</i>	94	106				
Unfair punishment	55	79				
Aggressive punishment	39	27				
<i>Other matters</i>	26	22		4	2	
Grading	9	6		1	2	
Criticising teaching method	5			2		
Discrimination	10	10		1		
Cheating		1				
Breaking social codes	2					
Imposing personal views		5				
Matters related to Students' behaviour	101	120	212	2	2	4
<i>Students' work moral</i>	67	68		2	2	
Violation of general school rules	39	49		1		
Forgetting homework and studies	19	9		1	1	
Cheating	7	5				
Inappropriate drawing	0	4				
Insulting and abusive language	2	1			1	
<i>Peer relations</i>	34	52				
Interpersonal relations	21	23				
Harassment	10	24				
Breaking social codes	3	5				
Sensitive issues	15		15		2	2
<i>Matters related to religion</i>	15					
Dress rules	6					
Boundaries of intimacy	6				1	
Doctrinal issues	3					
<i>Matters related to minorities</i>					1	
Matters related to Parents' behaviour	2		2	3	4	4
Discrimination	1					
Aggressive punishment	1			2	1	
Not co-operating with the school					1	
Grading					2	
Dropouts				1		

punished the whole class instead of one person or the punishment was too harsh for the infraction committed.

There were also cases related to aggressive punishments, which includes any kind of aggressive reaction by a staff member to students' mistakes. These cases included physical punishment, teasing, insulting, impolite language and shouting. The factors that provoked unfair and aggressive punishment by the staff were violations of the school's general rules and students' general responsibilities. The following quotation illustrates the conflicts related to aggressive punishment:

One of our teachers is very aggressive. She does not care about students. Once, two of my friends were talking in class, and the teacher hit their hands with a ruler. ... We were sad. ... (Female student).

Surprisingly, no teacher narrated any conflict related to punishment in contrast to previous studies (Tirri 1998).

Other matters included situations in which conflicts were related to grading, criticizing the teaching method, discrimination, cheating, breaking social codes and the imposition of a personal view by the teacher. A pertinent observation is that breaking

social codes and imposing personal views were two new themes specific to Iranian schools (see Tirri 1999). Nevertheless, this category was not very common among Iranian students and teachers. Grading and discrimination were the most frequently mentioned conflicts in this category. Students thought that their teachers were unfair in grading papers and gave scores lower than the students deserved. There was only one case, narrated by a student, in which one of the teachers cheated and gave the right answer to a student during an exam.

In the stories related to criticizing teaching, teachers confronted challenges about a colleague's teaching method. The teachers knew that there had been some issues, and they had to decide whether to tell their colleague about these and also how to convey the criticism. The teacher did not want to interfere with her colleague's teaching style, yet at the same time, she felt responsible for bringing the problem to the teacher's attention. Coping with colleagues at school is one of the main challenges teachers confront, according to studies (Colnerud 2015).

Matters related to students' behaviour Conflicts related to students' behaviour was the second most common moral issue. Two hundred twelve stories narrated by students and 4 stories narrated by teachers appear in this category, which includes two main subcategories: *Students' work moral* and *Peer relations*.

From the point of view of both students and teachers, *students' work moral* is the largest subcategory. These stories deal with students' duties and responsibilities at school. Staff members reacted when students violated a school's general rules. These rules include talking, laughing and eating in class, being late as well as bringing playing cards, CDs or cell phones to school. There were also conflicts over students' forgetting to study or to do their homework and over cheating, inappropriate drawing as well as using insulting and abusive language. The following quotation illustrates a student violation of a school's general rules. We also see the teacher's aggressive reaction to this violation from the student's point of view:

Once one of the students brought her cell phone to school and was calling her mom when suddenly the principal saw her. The principal took her cell and slapped [the student]. The principal did not have the right to hit her. ... (Female student)

The following story narrated by a teacher shows how students' work moral can create a moral challenge:

One of my students got zero points on 3 exams during a single month; she did not write anything in her papers. I realized that she was having some issues at home. Students usually do not like us to interfere in their personal lives. It was difficult for me to decide whether to talk with her or not. ... (Female teacher)

Peer relations. This subcategory only happened among students and refers to conflicts over interpersonal relations, harassment and breaking social codes. In all, peer relations were mostly narrated by girls, a finding which is in line with a study by Tirri (2003); however, harassment was mostly reported by boys. The moral conflicts in this subcategory most often dealt with interpersonal relations, which include fighting with peers and issues of friendship. For example, a student wrote:

I had a friend [student A] who was very jealous of my friendship with another student [student B], who is very close to me. She [A] affected my relation [with B] because she [A]

did not want us to be friends. She [A] moved to another city and now I am friends with that student [B], but I wish my friend [A] had talked with me about her feelings. . . (Female student)

The second main theme, harassment, refers to moral conflicts that arise from psychological violence among students. This category includes stories about bullying. The main reasons for being bullied were being physically small or not performing well academically in school. Teasing and blackmailing were also coded in this subcategory. Tormenting behaviour accounted for 50 per cent of the moral issues in Tirri's study (2003).

An additional eight stories narrate issues related to social codes. In all eight cases, the students were having their snacks together during break time, and another student ate their snacks without permission. In Iranian culture, it would be polite first to ask for permission before trying to eat someone's food.

Sensitive issues Given the number of teachers and students, the category of sensitive issues was quite small. This theme has two main subcategories: *Matters related to religion* and *Matters related to ethnicity*.

Matters related to religion: Conflicts concerning Islamic rules and values in the Iranian educational system were classified in this subcategory and designated Dress codes, Boundaries of intimacy and Doctrinal issues. An interesting observation about this subcategory is that all of the stories were narrated by female students (15) with the exception of one story written by a male teacher. This is in line with Finnish studies (Tirri 1998, 1999), which showed that only one teacher identified moral dilemmas related to religion. As a result of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, all aspects of Iranian society went through an Islamization process. In line with this change, religion became an important part of the Iranian educational system by contrast with liberal western countries. The Islamization process mostly affected women. For example, according to its dress code, it is the law for women to wear the hijab in public places, including schools. In addition, according to Shia Islam, which is the main religion in Iran, girls must undertake their religious obligations – wearing the hijab, praying, and fasting – at the age of 9, while the age for boys to begin observing their religious obligations is 15 (Hedayati et al. 2017b). This may be one reason why these issues were discussed only by female students.

Six girls wrote about conflicts arising from dress codes in Iran. According to Islamic rules, women in Iran have to cover their hair in public places, including in schools. The six female students believed that this rule was unfair, and they wanted freedom of choice. This subcategory also includes issues regarding boundaries of intimacy and physical contact between women. According to the Iranian educational system, teachers should monitor sexual intimacy among students as a guard against homosexuality. Six female students discussed issues of this kind; they believed that the staff's aggressive reaction to their intimacy could possibly ruin their friendship.

Only one male teacher wrote about boundaries of intimacy. It was hard for the teacher to decide how to help a student whose girlfriend became pregnant. Islamic principles forbid sexuality outside marriage, and the Iranian government has implemented harsh rules to control the expression of sexuality in Iranian society (Smerecnik et al. 2010).

There were also three stories related to doctrinal issues. All three took place during religious education classes where students were confused about Islam and wanted to ask questions about beliefs. According to these girls, the teachers reacted aggressively. It seems that teachers were worried that asking questions could lead to criticism of Islam, which is absolutely forbidden in Iran. Thus, these situations created a challenge for the teachers. However, from the girls' point of view, teachers should be 'up to date' and 'able to convince the students'.

Matters related to minorities: This category refers to a conflict over religious minorities in Iran narrated by one male teacher. In this story, some colleagues insulted the teacher's Sunni religion, causing a conflict for the teacher to decide how to react. Sunni Muslims are minorities in Iran (Cheng and Beigi 2012).

Matters related to parents' behaviour: The smallest portion of moral conflicts was related to the behaviour of parents at school, which involved aggressive punishment, discrimination, not co-operating with the school, grading and dropouts. Teachers identified more conflicts with parents than students did. According to previous research, dealing with parents is one of the main challenges for school teachers (see Tirri and Husu 2002; Hanhimäki and Tirri 2009; Koc and Buzzelli 2016). From the teachers' point of view, parents' aggressive punishments, both in the home and at school, often made it difficult for the teachers to decide whether to interfere. In these cases the teachers were also concerned about protecting their students from any harm or intervening in the parents' personal lives, which is in line with previous studies (Tirri and Husu 2002; Colnerud 2015). Teachers also faced challenges with parents who did not co-operate with the school over educational issues. There were also cases in which parents asked for their child's grade to be raised or who wanted the child to drop out of school. It is common that parents pressure teachers to bend the rules (Pope et al. 2009). In two cases, students wrote about parental discrimination.

Discussion

In this study we examined moral conflicts in Iranian secondary schools based on essays and interviews with students and teachers. A total of 310 stories was coded, using deductive and inductive content analysis. The results indicated that moral conflicts in Iranian schools have four main themes: *matters related to staff' behaviour*, *matters related to students' behaviour*, *sensitive issues* and *matters related to parents' behaviour* with the most common subcategories being punishment meted out by the staff and the school's general rules broken by students. Matters related to interpersonal relations and friendship were discussed only by students, while teachers discussed issues related to parents more than the students discussed these issues. It is clear that teachers were willing to discuss any of the conflicts, whether these related to students, colleagues or parents, while students mostly wrote about issues related to the school staff.

This study, which is in line with previous research (Tirri 1998, 1999, 2003), found that the behaviour of the school staff and the way the staff members reacted to student violations of rules and misbehaviour is the most common theme in schools. In line with Tirri's studies (1999, 2003) the staff's unfair and aggressive punishments were the most controversial issue from the students' point of view, even though Iranian school staff members are supposed to verify the motivation and reason behind the violation before

any punishment is meted out (*Executive Regulations for Schools* 2000). Punishment seems to be a universal issue in schools, and physical punishment seems to be the most common (Islam and Akhter 2015). Even if physical punishment and insulting behaviour are forbidden according to the Iranian Ministry of Education, aggressive punishment is conducted in Iranian schools as an effective means of discipline (Soheil 2015). In Iran, physical punishment seems to be more common in boys' schools (*Executive Regulation for Schools* 2000; Soheil 2015), however, in our study, such punishment was reported equally by boys and girls.

This study also found that the punishments mostly took place as a reaction to student violations of school rules, values and duties. Previous research has shown that teachers find it challenging to deal with these situations, as a school's values and students' values might be in conflict (Tirri 1998; Pope et al. 2009). This suggests that in most of the stories, the students violated a value held by a staff member who then decided to punish the student, while students found the reaction unfair and aggressive. Interestingly, this finding is in line with Gholami, Kuusisto, and Tirri's (2015) study, which showed that Iranian teachers do not tend to take the perspective of others, which is an indicator of moral sensitivity and a caring attitude. This attitude could also reflect the large power distance in Iranian culture and schooling system (Gholami, Kuusisto, and Tirri 2015). The Iranian educational context has an authoritative atmosphere (Hasani 2015, 2016), and previous research has demonstrated that punishment is a sign of misusing authority (Tirri and Puolimatka 2000).

Considering the students' perspectives in the stories, it seems that they did not take the staff's perspective either. Students mention violations of rules and values; however, they mostly focused on the staff's improper reaction. Taking the perspective of others is one of the skills that a morally sensitive person would use to see both sides of a conflict and develop empathy (Narvaez and Endicott 2001). Furthermore, being able to understand how others feel and being able to consider justice and care in moral issues are essential parts of moral reasoning (Tirri 2003). The failure to take this perspective or show empathy could be related to the fact that the Iranian educational system mostly focuses on preaching moral values without promoting moral reasoning (Hasani 2015) or moral sensitivity (Gholami, Kuusisto, and Tirri 2015). It appears that lack of moral sensitivity is an issue in many educational systems (see Osbeck et al. 2018).

According to this study, moral conflicts seem to be similar in educational settings in Iran and Finland. However, there are also culturally dependent conflicts, such as *matters related to religion*, which are related to the Islamic worldview specific to Iranian culture. The stories narrated in this study reflect the importance of Islamic values in the Iranian educational system. Studies show religious values rank high from the point of view of the Iranian school staff (Alavi and Rahimipoor 2010). In addition, the Iranian Ministry of Education is strict about selecting teachers who have religious and moral qualifications (Hedayati et al. 2017a).

It should be mentioned that moral conflicts in a school context have a relational nature. Conflict involves at least two sides, including teacher-student, student-student or student-adult, in which one side of the conflict is the protagonist (Tirri 2003). In future studies investigation of the social relationships in moral conflicts could provide valuable information. The data were collected from only two schools in one Iranian

city, Tehran. Thus, the results cannot be generalized to all Iranian students and school staff members.

This paper opens a new area of research that has not been investigated earlier in Iran or the Middle East. Given the increasing interest in this geographical area (Franken 2018), the present study provides important information for researchers and educators that will enhance their understanding of possible value conflicts in a school context between students and families from Muslim countries and those from western countries. In closing, we believe that the result of this study can guide educators in delivering moral education in teaching and teacher education. First, these real-life stories narrated by students and teachers could be used in teacher education programs. Second, the results show that moral sensitivity should be developed in schools. Both teaching staff and students need to be aware of the moral effect of their actions and be able to imagine the cause and effect of different actions on the different parties involved. Third, it seems that there is a gap between the rules and the practice that policymakers and educators need to consider, for example unfair punishments. Moral conflict invites school communities to discuss the diversity of worldviews and to take the perspective of all sides involved.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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